



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Managing California's Working Lands

OFFICE OF MINE RECLAMATION

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California's Abandoned Mine Lands Program Fact Sheet Stay Out - Stay Alive!

Nearly every year, people are killed or injured in abandoned mines; accidents that can also put trained rescue personnel at risk. More than three dozen incidents have already been reported in California since 1990 (see summaries on page 2). The Abandoned Mine Lands Unit (AMLU) encourages you to “**Stay Out - Stay Alive!**” This message is part of a national campaign to warn the public about the dangers associated with abandoned mines (see www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp). In 2008, the AMLU, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), and other agencies collaborated on a DVD containing two personal stories revealing the dangers of California's abandoned mines. Video clips from the DVD can be viewed at www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Isaac.wvx and www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Rusty.wvx.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What should I do in an emergency involving an abandoned mine?

Call 911 or contact your local sheriff's office. If someone is injured due to a fall or is trapped in an abandoned mine, do not try to rescue the victim yourself. Rescue attempts should only be made by professionals with proper training and equipment to avoid further injury to the victim or yourself.

2. How do I report an abandoned mine other than in an emergency situation?

You can call the AMLU using its toll-free hotline at **1-877-OLD-MINE (1-877-653-6463)**.

3. Are abandoned mines dangerous?

Yes. Many abandoned mines in California date back to the Gold Rush and can be an irresistible and deadly draw for children and adults. Dangers include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Vertical shafts can be shallow to hundreds of feet deep. At the surface, they may be unprotected, hidden by vegetation, or covered by rotting boards. Waste rock piles may look like a fun place to jump over with a bike or ATV, but open shafts may lie on the other side.
- Unstable rock and rotting timbers may present falling hazards. Darkness and debris add to the hazards and can disorient visitors, leaving them lost underground.
- Pockets of oxygen-depleted air or lethal gas (e.g., carbon monoxide) can cause asphyxiation.
- Abandoned mines are often used as habitat by wildlife, including rattlesnakes.
- Blasting caps or dynamite left behind can be extremely unstable and may detonate at any time.
- Environmental hazards at abandoned mine sites can harm humans and wildlife. Visitors can be exposed to high levels of lead, mercury, and/or cyanide left over from the processing of ore. Dust from disturbed, naturally-occurring arsenic or asbestos, or diseases such as hantavirus or valley fever, may cause health problems. Water in a mine can react with sulfide-bearing rock to produce acid-generating conditions and leach heavy metals from rock (acid rock drainage).

CALIFORNIA'S ABANDONED MINES

REPORTED FATAL & "NEAR MISS"* ACCIDENTS (2000-2009)



2009

- **Nevada Co.** Local firefighters rescued a 137-pound dog from an abandoned mine shaft along an Irrigation District ditch near the dog owner's property.
- **Kern Co.** A male (unknown age) was rescued after falling with his motorcycle 12 feet down a mine shaft. He was reportedly bruised but had no broken bones.
- **Inyo Co.** A man (22) died after falling off a highwall of a glory hole at the Tungsten Blue Mine.
- **Kern Co.** A man (20) fell into an unmarked abandoned mine shaft. He reported that he was "okay."
- **Tuolumne Co.** Rescuers pulled a dog from a 40-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A boy (15) rode his trail bike into a 20-foot-deep mine shaft. He injured his left arm.

2008

- **Tuolumne Co.** A man (34) was rescued 30 hours after he fell 100 feet down a winze inside an abandoned mine and landed in five feet of water. He had minor injuries.
- **Madera Co.** Three men in their 20s died from carbon monoxide poisoning in an abandoned gold mine they had dewatered and were exploring.
- **Placer Co.** Firefighters rescued a dog from a 40-foot-deep shaft hidden in undergrowth near a popular trail. Park rangers later found a deer in another shaft nearby.

2007

- **Kern Co.** A boy (11) taking pictures of an abandoned mine fell into a shaft breaking several bones.
- **Kern Co.** An SUV was found in an abandoned mine shaft in an area not designated for off-road travel.
- **Plumas Co.** A man (41) died after he was thrown from his motorcycle on a rocky trail at an abandoned quarry.
- **Kern Co.** A woman nearly drove her quad into a 500-foot-deep shaft; after riding up a "hill" (waste rock from the shaft), her front wheels rolled off the shaft's edge.

2006

- **Kern Co.** A boy (9) who fell with his motorcycle 40 feet into a shaft was rescued and hospitalized.
- **El Dorado Co.** Two workers (49 & 32), who entered an abandoned mine to pump water to a water tanker, died after becoming overcome by the pump's fumes.
- **Riverside Co.** A man (27) on an off-road vehicle fell 40 feet down an abandoned mine shaft; 18 firefighters worked approximately seven hours to rescue him.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A man (34) was paralyzed after falling into the same shaft a man died in a week earlier; about 60 emergency workers helped to rescue him.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A man (41) died after walking into an adit and falling 50 feet down an internal shaft.

- **Imperial Co.** Two men (62 & 67) were rescued 40 hours after they drove an SUV into a mine shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** The Trona Fire Department pulled a dog from a mine shaft.
- **Alameda Co.** A pickup truck driver crashed in a quarry (a similar accident occurred at this quarry in 2005).

2005

- **Alameda Co.** A man (23) doing off-road tricks in a pickup slid off the steep edge of an abandoned quarry and hundreds of feet into a back yard. He was uninjured.
- **Kern Co.** A mine rescue team pulled a dog from a 50-foot-deep shaft, a half-mile from a community college.
- **Kern Co.** A mine rescue team pulled two men (28 & 26) from a 40-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.

2004-2000

- **Kern Co.** A man driving with his family on a dirt road nearly backed into a 53-foot-deep shaft (his car's left rear tire was hanging over the shaft edge).
- **San Bernardino Co.** A motorcyclist (21) died after falling about 700 feet into an uncovered shaft.
- **Riverside Co.** A (16) suffered head injuries after falling 50 feet into an abandoned quarry.
- **Inyo Co.** A dog was rescued about one month after falling into a 30-foot-deep abandoned mine pit.
- **Kern Co.** A boy (11) was injured after he and his dirt bike fell into a 40-foot-deep shaft.
- **Kern Co.** A boy (13) was injured when he fell 30 feet down an internal shaft in an adit.
- **Del Norte Co.** A man (45) died and his son (19) was injured after their off-road vehicle drove into an air shaft.
- **Butte Co.** A dog was rescued about eight weeks after it fell into a 50-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.
- **Kern Co.** A motorcyclist (32) was injured after falling about 50 feet into a shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A motorcyclist (14) fell 25 feet into a shaft and was rescued by his father.
- **Orange Co.** Two brothers (18 & 23) died while exploring a flooded, abandoned mine.
- **Kern Co.** A boy (10) was rescued after he fell 200 feet down a shaft. He had no major injuries.
- **El Dorado Co.** Firefighters rescued a dog that had spent four hours in a flooded mine shaft.
- **Placer Co.** Two boys found the body of a man who had drowned in deep water in an abandoned quarry.
- **San Diego Co.** A boy (16) drowned in a quarry swimming hole that was cordoned off due to its dangers.
- **Riverside Co.** Firefighters rescued a man (35) who was trapped for two days after falling into an old quarry. He was treated for dehydration and bruises.
- **El Dorado Co.** Firefighters rescued a man (47) from a mine shaft. He had broken bones, cuts, and bruises.

* Accidents that could have resulted in a fatality, but did not (see also www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp).